

CHRB NEWS & REVIEW

NEWSLETTER OF THE CALIFORNIA HORSE RACING BOARD

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JOHN HARRIS: CALIFORNIA-BRED CHAMPION

If experience is the best teacher, then John Harris has degrees in race-horse ownership and breeding, race-track management, and industry oversight.

Appointed to the California Horse Racing Board by Governor Gray Davis last November, Harris has been grooming for this post since his grandfather first took him to the Fresno Fair races at the age of 7.

"That used to happen a lot more than it does nowadays, kids going to the races with their folks, getting interested in horses," said Harris. "I was hooked from the very first day."

The hook sank even deeper when his father started claiming and racing



JOHN HARRIS

horses in 1954. Within a few years, at the age of 15, Harris purchased his first horse.

But racing had to wait. First there was high school, then college. Harris earned a bachelor's degree in agricultural production from the University of California at Davis in 1965. Then he spent three years in the Army. He served as battery commander of a Nike Hercules missile site in Korea.

After his discharge in 1968, Harris returned to the family farm near Fresno, young, full of energy, ambitious, and eager to grow the family business into new areas.

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MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Horse identifiers – those officials authorized by the California Horse Racing Board to verify and document the identities of horses racing in California – have an enormous responsibility. Horse racing depends on the accuracy of their work.

We've always had a good, reliable system of identifying horses, but now it's even better with the introduction of a new computerized horse identification management system.

We are in the process of installing high-speed Internet access lines at every racetrack in California, which will give horse identifiers access to a database containing digital photographs and related information on every horse racing in the state.

This issue of News & Review contains an article and accompanying photographs describing in detail how the new system works.

With digital photography and direct access to foal information at The Jockey Club, we can virtually eliminate the possibility of the wrong horse running in a race. And it will help the stewards properly identify horses arriving from other jurisdictions without proper documentation.

This can save everyone a lot of grief. No one wants to go to the trouble and expense of shipping a horse and not getting the opportunity to run. And given the short fields in California, we don't want to lose a horse from a race because of misplaced papers.

The CHRB is ready to share its database with other racing jurisdictions and make this a national reciprocal program, which will help the racing industry as a whole.

Roy C. Wood, Jr.
Roy C. Wood, Jr.



IN THE GOLDEN STATE

CHRB's new digital photo system gives horse identifiers tools they need for positive ID

The CHRB staff worked with field personnel to fine tune the new software program that provides vivid photographs to official horse identifiers at racetracks. Coupled with information from The Jockey Club national foal registry, the new system virtually eliminates any possibility of horse misidentification.

A picture is worth a thousand words, and in the case of the California Horse Racing Board's new horse identification system, a digital photo also can clear up confusion and even prevent fraud.

Horse identifiers traditionally have used very basic methods – lip tattoos, photographs, foal certificates, colors and markings, and other pedigree information – to make certain that the right horse with the right name is competing in the right race.

All of this has worked very well, but new technology will eliminate even the slightest possibility of the wrong horse competing in a race, either through confusion or by intention.

All horses have individual unique markings that can be identified through close examination. Digital technology allows identifiers to magnify even the smallest and faintest of these markings on photographs stored in the database for a conclusive comparison with the horse in question.

In a cooperative effort with The Jockey Club – the organization that identifies and registers all thoroughbred foals in the United States – the CHRB acquired software developed by the Canadian firm ISI Inc. to fully computerize the state's horse identification system. The software allows horse photographs, markings, and all of the other information used by horse identifiers to be digitally stored in a central database and accessed through computers at racetracks.

Mory Atashkar, the CHRB's chief information officer who oversees the agency's management information systems, worked closely with Diane Piper, the horse identifier on the Southern California thoroughbred circuit, and her assistant, Sandra Aguirre, during the recent meet at Santa Anita to test the new system and work out the glitches.

Digital subscriber lines (DSLs) are being installed at all racetracks in California, so that all horse identifiers will have access to the Internet and the ID system's database contain-

ing thousands of digital photographs and related information.

Piper provided the details, along with some historical background to explain how the identification system has evolved over the years.

"We've always had the foal certificates from The Jockey Club, which provide very detailed and precise descriptions of the horse, its pedigree, its markings, and so forth," she began. "The various racing jurisdictions require these certificates to accompany the horse wherever it goes to race. If the certificate gets separated from the horse, the stewards have to get involved, and there's a chance the horse won't be allowed to run.

"We've also got the lip tattoo. Every young horse that

(Continued on page 6)

CALENDAR

JUNE

- 1 – CHRB monthly meeting in San Mateo.**
- 13 – Stockton fair meet opens.**
- 27 – Pleasanton fair meet opens**

JULY

- 11 – Vallejo fair meet opens**
- 18 – Del Mar meet opens**
- 19 – CHRB monthly meeting in Del Mar.**
- 25 – Santa Rosa fair meet opens.**

Honorable Man, Honorable Profession

Dr. Alan Edmondson knows plenty about horses. That much is certain, given that he recently retired after more than 50 years as a practicing and official veterinarian in California horse racing. But his original expertise was in – yeah, you guessed it – turkeys!

Back in 1945, after he earned his veterinary degree at Texas A&M, Edmondson served in the Army reserves, dealing mostly with horses and cattle. But when turkeys started dying in Central California, Edmondson was sent to Bakersfield to deal with the problem.

“A virus was causing their sinuses to fill up and get so big that it covered their eyes, so they couldn’t see to find anything to eat and they starved to death,” explained Edmondson. “The treatment was simple enough: lance it, squirt in some iodine mixture to wash out the infection, the swelling went down, the turkey could see again, so it ate. When this worked, everyone thought I was a genius.”

But Edmondson didn’t want to remain the resident turkey expert. He had something else in mind, dating back to 1937 when he and his father visited a friend, a blacksmith working at Santa Anita Park.

“I loved being around the racetrack, and I said I wanted to get a job there just like him,” recalled Edmondson. “The fellow told me that shoeing horses was back-breaking labor. He said a veterinarian was the way to go, so I took his advice.”

Edmondson returned to Santa Anita in 1949, one of only a handful of veterinarians working in the horse-racing industry, which was still in its infancy in California. That’s also when he married Sidney, his wife of 52 years, who recently passed away.

During those early years, he eased into the role of official veterinarian for the California Horse Racing Board, filling in

for others when the need arose. When a permanent position opened for him in 1960, he took the job. Now, some 40 years later, at the age of 80, he can reflect on his life and career.

“I never made as much money as an official as I would have in private practice, but it was a decent salary and there was the satisfaction of knowing you were doing something important for the industry and helping protect the integrity of the sport,” he said. “I was there when we put in a lot of the security measures that are still in place today. The oversight, the procedures – most of them have worked pretty well for all those years.”

“We always were very conscious of the need to maintain the

chain of custody of the samples we took from horses. That’s why I personally drove them to Truesdail each night back when the laboratory was located at Avenue 42 and the Pasadena Freeway. I never let them out of my sight. The drive



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THE EQUINE PRESCRIPTION

FROM THE DESK OF THE CHRB
EQUINE MEDICAL DIRECTOR



DR. RON JENSEN

Horseplayers are probably not aware that they are important supporters of equine research essential to understanding and dealing with medical problems of the horse.

During the winter Symposium on Racing in Tucson, Dr. Scott Waterman of the University of Arizona Race Track Industry Program presented the results of a survey he conducted with Peggy Hendershot of the National Thoroughbred Racing Association.

Their survey revealed that pari-mutuel wagering is the largest contributor to equine research in the United States. In 1999, horse-racing pari-mutuel wagering provided a record \$5.3 million for this purpose. Seventeen states now actively fund equine research through pari-mutuel wagering and have contributed more than \$41 million since 1970.

Californians will be proud to learn that California is the leading contributing pari-mutuel state. In 1999, California contributed \$2,421,275 (45% of the 1999 total), and has donated \$16,771,834 since 1987.

California's generous contribution to equine research is largely due to legislation sponsored by the late Senator Ken Maddy. The resulting law directs 0.1 cents of every dollar wagered to the University of California at Davis specifically for equine research. Two thirds of the total contribution goes to the Kenneth L. Maddy Equine Analytic Chemistry Laboratory, a state-of-the-art chemistry laboratory engaged in drug testing and drug research.

The funds have not only helped build and equip the laboratory, they have been used to develop and maintain a group of racing-fit horses utilized in drug research. This has allowed researchers at the Maddy Lab to use animals that closely resemble horses in racing situations when the researchers conduct studies involving the affect and elimination of drugs and medications.

The remaining third of the funds goes to the Center for Equine Health for other types of research, including in the

areas of orthopedics, reproduction, infectious diseases, epidemiology, surgery, and anesthesia.

The results of this research benefit all breeds of horses, not just racehorses. One of the current studies of particular interest to the racing industry deals with shoeing and the risk of injury and lameness in racehorses.

Also, considerable effort is directed into developing computer models of the bones, muscles, tendons, and ligaments of the lower limb and simulation of a racehorse forelimb at a racing gallop. When completed, these computer models

should be of great assistance in examining and understanding many of the lameness problems racehorses experience.

Several racing-related studies have been initiated by findings from the California Post-Mortem Program. While this program is not funded by the pari-mutuel tax, it is supported by all segments of the California racing industry and has led to important research studies and results.

The subject of funding equine research in California would not be complete without mentioning the important donations of individuals and organizations. Their generosity, combined with the funding from pari-mutuel wagering, has contributed greatly to making the University of California at Davis a world leader in equine research.

“Seventeen states now actively fund equine research through pari-mutuel wagering and have contributed more than \$41 million since 1970...Californians will be proud to learn that California is the leading contributing pari-mutuel state.”

Ron Jensen



BE OUR GUEST...



The California Horse Racing Board believes the best way to regulate an industry is to be fully informed. The CHRB regularly solicits input from the public and the horse-racing industry, and this guest editorial page is one more forum for that purpose.

This guest editorial is provided by Jack Liebau, a longtime horse owner in California who segued into racetrack management in the 1980s. Liebau now serves as president of three Magna-owned California tracks, Santa Anita Park, Golden Gate Fields, and Bay Meadows.

In 1998, when the list of potential purchasers for Santa Anita Park was first made public, many people in racing were familiar with Frank Stronach's name, but few had heard of Magna International, the company he founded.

Today, Magna is a name well-known to anyone with an interest in California racing—be they fans, horsemen, or owners. In a short period of time, the company has arguably done more to boost the fortunes of racing throughout California than any company ever involved with racing in the state.

In little more than two years, Magna has purchased three of California's and the nation's leading racetracks in Santa Anita, Golden Gate Fields, and Bay Meadows, as well as the San Luis Rey Downs training facility. The company has made significant improvements to Santa Anita, Golden Gate, and San Luis Rey Downs. This investment of more than \$285 million in barely 30 months is undeniable proof of the company's long-term commitment to California racing.

When Magna first arrived on the California racing scene, it established three primary objectives: enhance the on-track experience for customers, ensure the safety of horses, and improve living conditions for backside employees. Magna has already spent tens of millions of dollars to achieve those objectives.

Only a few days after completing its purchase of Santa Anita, Magna unveiled plans for the most ambitious improvement project in the track's history. These improvements were designed to enhance the on-track experience for patrons and to attract new fans. The \$45 million project was concluded by Santa Anita's 2000

Opening Day, and included the spectacular FrontRunner Restaurant, a dramatic new fan-friendly apron, and a state-of-the art infield video display board. Everyone who has recently visited the track has applauded the improvements.

After hearing comments from horsemen regarding the crowded training conditions at Southern California's tracks, Magna moved to address the problem early in 1999 by spending more than \$6 million to purchase the San Luis Rey Downs training facility near Bonsall. Magna then spent almost \$1 million on improvements at the facility, including construction of a new safety rail, renovations to barns and offices, purchase of new tractors and heavy maintenance equipment, and the hiring of more employees to provide better service for the horsemen stabled there.

Today, the improved San Luis Rey Downs gives horsemen a much-needed training center to help alleviate overcrowding during training hours at Santa Anita, Hollywood Park, and Del Mar. Because San Luis Rey Downs benefits racing in all of Southern California and not just racing at Santa Anita, we are hopeful that it will be subsidized as an off-track facility in the same manner as Fairplex.

From the time it purchased Santa Anita, Magna publicly discussed plans to significantly improve its backside area. The plans, which were first presented to the City of Arcadia in September, are currently in the process of being revised in response to comments from city officials,

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NEW DIGITAL PHOTO ID SYSTEM GIVES

(Continued from page 2)

reaches the racetrack gets tattooed before it can run. The tattoo is a unique number that's imprinted on the inside of the lip.

"Then there are the photographs. We have several of each horse. We take photos of every horse that comes here to race for the first time, and we store them in that horse's file along with the other information. The photos were black and white until 1985, when we switched to color, which obviously was a big improvement.

"We use all of these tools – the papers, the tattoos, the photographs – to identify each horse entered to run. If we're unfamiliar with the horse, we'll go to the barn the day before the race to make the initial ID. In any case, we identify each horse when it comes to the receiving barn before each race.

"Historically, there have been two potential problems with the process," Piper continued. "One I already mentioned – the possibility of the certificate getting separated from the horse. Maybe the driver transporting the horse forgets to bring it or misplaces it. Maybe the trainer thinks the owner has it, and the owner thinks the trainer has it. However it happens, the horse arrives, there's no certificate, and the stewards have to decide whether there's enough information to conclusively identify the horse so that it can run.

"The other potential problem is the switching of two horses. This could be done accidentally – perhaps through confusion over two horses with very similar markings that are shipped together. Or it could be done intentionally by someone trying to run a ringer and cash a bet. This would probably involve a forged or altered foal certificate.

"The Jockey Club improved the process tremendously last summer by providing Internet access to their complete race programs. Authorized horse identifiers like myself are given access codes to The Jockey Club database. These programs are arranged systematically beginning with the first horse (post one) in the first race through to the last horse (the outside post) in the last race on the card. Each entry, each horse, has all of the relevant information from the foal certificate – the colors, the markings, everything.

"In some ways the program information is more reliable than the actual foal certificate because the downloaded information can't be tampered with," noted Piper. "That means we can compare the program information with the foal certificates on hand to spot forgeries. And the stewards can rely on The Jockey Club information to help identify any horse that arrives without papers.

"The new digital ID system virtually eliminates both potential problems. The key is the digital photograph. Horses are like people. Two people might look a lot alike, but there

are always slight differences. Maybe you part your hair on the left, or your hair is slightly grayer on the sides. A close-enough examination can spot those differences.

"With the new digital system, we can zero-in on any part of the photograph to magnify any marking and prove without any doubt that the horse standing in front of us is the horse in the photo. For example, the night eyes – little calcium formations on the inside of horses' legs – are absolutely unique. No sets are alike. Or if need be, we can magnify and count the dark spots on the coronet.

"We are in the process of scanning all of our old 5-by-7 photos into the new system. Meanwhile, whenever a new horse comes on the grounds – a young unraced horse or one shipping in from out of state – we use our digital camera to take new photographs, which go directly into the system," she concluded.

As envisioned, eventually The Jockey Club, California, and other states will be linked, which will allow everyone to share photographs. When a horse ships in from another jurisdiction, Piper and the other identifiers will be able to download that horse's photos instead of taking new ones themselves. And when California-based horses ship out of state, other jurisdictions will be able to access the CHRB database through The Jockey Club link. It will become a national reciprocal program.



The top photograph to the right comes directly from the CHRB database. It is one of several photos stored of every horse that races in California.

The bottom photos demonstrate how any part of the horse can be magnified to clearly show the details of markings that are unique to each horse.

IDENTIFIERS ACCESS TO LARGE DATABASE



Today, along with his wife, Carole, he is the master of Harris Farms, a sprawling self-contained community with its own airstrip, hotel, and restaurant near Coalinga. They farm about 14,000 acres of the farm, which is impressive in itself, but their cattle operation is among the largest in the state. Anyone driving along Interstate 5 at the junction of Highway 145 can't help but notice the massive feedlot where Harris keeps about 100,000 head of cattle.

“People know that we raise a good horse, and that we take care of our horses, so we're popular at the claiming box. It's sort of a painless way to sell a horse. All of this helps keep our business going.”

John Harris

“We also started gradually building up our racing and breeding operation when I returned to the farm in the late '60s,” explained Harris. “At the start we had 10 or 15 mares and one stallion. Through the '70s we built up to about 40 broodmares. Right now we have about 65, and we stand about 10 stallions, the best of which are probably Cee's Tizzy and High Brite. We also have shares in other stallions.

“Our goal always has been to breed and race good California-breds. This means buying nice mares at the sales and retiring our better breeding-prospect mares, and also attracting good stallions to the farm. The problem is, you can get too many horses, and you do have to pay the bills.

BOTH SPORT AND BUSINESS

“We've always run our operation as a business. It's a sport, yes. A game, yes. But also a business. So, we also sell horses at the sales to bring in some money. And we get a lot of horses claimed from us. People know that we raise a good horse, and that we take care of our horses, so we're popular at the claiming box. It's sort of a painless way to sell a horse. All of this helps keep our business going.

“We've learned as we've gone along. We started out racing at the county fairs. In fact, one of our horses, Big Jess, really dominated the circuit in the early '70s. Gradually, we moved up to the bigger racetracks to run for the richer purses, so that today we normally have 20 to 25 horses in training at one of the major tracks, plus the young horses and lay-ups at the farm.”

Along with the horse trainers at the racetracks, Harris

credited three “key people” for the ongoing success of his racing operation: farm manager Dave McGlothlin, farm trainer Pier Antonsen, and resident veterinarian Jeanne Bowers.

WEALTH OF EXPERIENCE

If Harris' only involvement in racing were as an owner and breeder, he would be just one among many important people in the industry. But what makes him unique is the way he has branched out into related areas, giving him a wealth of experience unmatched by anyone else.

“As I grew more involved in agriculture, I became more and more immersed in labor law and water law, and that took me to the capital,” he explained. “But because of my love of racing, my work in Sacramento evolved pretty fast to include horse stuff.

“I was pretty much filling a void because the breeders were not very active players on the legislative scene. The racetracks always had been very well represented. I encouraged the breeders to do the same. After all, we're much more natural advocates because we've got people in every district. Breeders tend to have more ties to individual legislators. Myself, I was a very close personal friend to Senator Ken Maddy, who I met during his first term as a Fresno assemblyman in 1970. We shared a love of horseracing.

“I was elected a director of the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association in 1974, and I served as the organization's legislative chairman for 20 years. Really, it's been a fun association, one that I've enjoyed very much, because we've got a great group of folks, including my good friend Don Valpredo.

“Together we've managed to strengthen the breeders' voice – to state our positions when legislation comes up that affects us.

“We've also expanded the California-bred incentive fund. Originally this program earmarked 10% of the purse to the breeder of the winning horse. Now it's a lot more than that. We've gone from about a \$1-million program to about a \$14-million program over a 30-year period, plus another \$16 million in purses for California-bred races, including the Cal-bred stakes.

“I believe that through our collective efforts, we've also improved the quality of horses being bred in California. Although the foal crops have gone down in numbers, on the whole we're producing better horses. A good example of that is Tiznow, the first Cal-bred to be named Horse of the Year in North America since Swaps in 1956.”

Tiznow, winner of the 2000 Breeders' Cup Classic, was sired by Cee's Tizzy and was bred and raised at his farm, so Harris is especially proud of Tiznow's accomplishments.

“The fact is, our breeding program helps the state econ-

omy,” he continued. “One purpose of the Horse Racing Law is to encourage agricultural production. Our program accomplishes just that by encouraging people not only to breed horses, but to race them here in California.”

ACTIVE WITH LEGISLATURE

Harris spends a good deal of time trying to get this message across to decision-makers in Sacramento. He said the job is more difficult since the death of Senator Maddy last year.

“When we had Ken in the Legislature, he was sort of the go-to guy for racing matters,” said Harris. “Ken had the respect of his fellow legislators. They listened to him. Now it’s a larger challenge to get their attention because many of the newer legislators have only a passing interest in racing matters. This is something we need to overcome.

“I’m always inviting legislators to the farm, as a sort of educational program on racing matters. Nothing works as well as this hands-on approach. They can see firsthand the economic impact of racing – see our employees and the product we turn out. They come away realizing that, although the racetrack is an important part of the industry, there is far more to it than the racetrack. The farms are the backbone.”

When Harris talks about the racetracks, he’s again speaking from a position of knowledge, as he served as chairman of Bay Meadows from 1992 to 1997.

“What happened was there was friction on the Bay Meadows Board,” he said. “I knew a lot of the directors, and I had accumulated some stock in the company, which I subsequently sold, so I was brought in as a sort of neutral party. That was quite a learning experience. It was unusual for me to be on the side of track management. I had traditionally been on the horse-owners’ side.

“My years at Bay Meadows reinforced my concern that we really need to do something to reinvigorate on-track attendance. We did a lot of promotions during those years, and I’m proud to say that some of them worked. Our twilight racing programs helped bring in new customers. And we made better use of our infield.

“I was the one who hired Jack Liebau, who has gone on to play a vital role in the industry as director of California racing for Magna Entertainment (owner of Santa Anita Park, Bay Meadows, and Golden Gate Fields). We were in need of a manager at Bay Meadows, so we asked Jack to be the interim manager until we could find somebody. He never left.”

INDUSTRY LEADER

At various times, Harris also has been a board member of such racing-related organizations as the Breeders’ Cup, Grayson-Jockey Club Research Foundation, Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association, Thoroughbred Owners of California, The Jockey Club, and Center for Equine Health at UC Davis.

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John Harris

His benevolent interests also have included service with the Saint Agnes Medical Center, Pacific Legal Foundation, and Agriculture in the Classroom program.

Given this extensive background in horseracing and public affairs, Harris approaches his work as a racing commissioner with the confidence of someone who knows the industry inside and out – its long history of successes and failures, all of its strengths and weaknesses, and all of its major players.

His knowledge and self-assurance has been obvious at monthly CHRB meetings, where he has questioned longstanding regulatory practices and challenged industry leaders to be less complacent and more proactive.

“Although our role as racing commissioners is not clearly defined, and it can get a little blurry about what we’re supposed to be doing on the Board, I think it’s absolutely clear that we need to do everything we can to spark a resurgence in racing,” said Harris. “Racing has been declining in attendance – in fan interest – largely because people have so many other choices now. If this decline continues, the industry will have a very serious problem.

“Something we’ve talked a lot about already is field size and how we need more horses to make the races more competitive and to increase fan interest. As a racing commissioner, I think that adjusting the racing dates is one way to approach this problem. By that I mean cutting back on the number of races. But we need to do that while keeping in mind all of the people who have horses that eat every day and require care every day, so they need ample opportunities to race. That’s why I don’t advocate lopping off weeks at a time from our schedule, but rather cutting back to more four-day weeks, and certainly discouraging six-day weeks.

“I really want to hear from racing fans on this issue. That’s one segment of the industry that doesn’t attend our Board meetings with any consistency and that’s rarely heard from. Perhaps we can do something about that by conducting more of an outreach program to get people more involved in the process. Maybe we could have all of our Board meetings on the Internet, so that the public can pick it up live. That way,

(Continued on next page)

residents of Arcadia, and horsemen. The plans include construction of new barns and dormitories. Consideration is also being given to the present tracks being reconfigured to include a 1 1/8-mile main track, a one-mile grass track, and a seven-eighths inner dirt track.

At Golden Gate, Magna spent more than \$5 million to improve the track's facilities and backside area, making it a far better place to stable and train horses. These changes, coupled with Bay Meadows' state-of-the-art backside facilities, should contribute to a larger horse population in Northern California.

Magna has also addressed the issue of living conditions for backside employees at its California tracks. More than \$10 million has been spent at Santa Anita to improve living quarters used by backside employees and to improve the overall appearance of the backside by constructing underground storage bunkers for used straw and bedding. Magna's expenditure includes completion of a new sanitary sewer system for removal of wastewater.

While important, purchasing racetracks and making improvements to them doesn't by itself define Magna as part of the California racing culture. In the past two years,

Magna has proven itself to be accessible to horsemen and has been anything but an absentee owner. This accessibility has been demonstrated by numerous meetings and public forums conducted by Magna management ranging from Chairman Frank Stronach and myself to the senior management at each of the Magna California facilities. We will continue to make ourselves available and urge you to let us know your thoughts regarding racing in California.

Magna's plans for Santa Anita and its Northern California tracks are bold and exciting and offer strong evidence of the company's intent to carry out Frank Stronach's vision to create world-renowned showcases presenting the finest racing possible.



HARRIS

(Continued from previous page)

they would see the Board meetings as something they can participate in. It would allow them to speak out more.

"In this and other ways, I want the Board to get more involved in the technological age. This means not only communications involving the Internet, but also our licensing process and perhaps horse identification and security cameras. All of these things need to be explored.

"One of the toughest issues to tackle is the whole medication deal," continued Harris. "Obviously, we need high integrity in all of our medication programs. At the same time, we need to face the fact that our testing methods have become so sensitive that we probably should establish threshold levels for most drugs.

"Zero tolerance sounds nice, but it doesn't really fit in today's world. When you look at the new testing laboratory at UC Davis, the sensitivity of their equipment, and the money we are spending to find drugs at levels so low they could never affect the outcome of a race, it really seems counterintuitive to be doing that kind of program.

"Yes, we need to be very strict with clear offenders, but if something clearly did not affect a horse's performance, we

need to recognize that fact.

"It's important that the Board be even-handed in everything it does, with all participants," said Harris. "We don't want to appear more forgiving of one segment of the industry than another.

"Are the racetracks being managed properly? Are their ambulances in working order? Are their bathrooms clean? Is backstretch housing adequate? You know, racing dates are a precious resource. We need to remind whoever gets those dates of their obligation to the state, to the public, to the horsemen, and to the workers to run the facility for the benefit of all parties."



made for a long day, but it made my cases airtight. Of course, eventually we arranged for a courier service, but the chain of custody is just as tight as before.

“I always took a personal interest in the horses. When they were brought over to the receiving barn, I always looked them over pretty well. And if a handler had a concern about something – maybe a quarter crack or an eye problem – well, I would check it out very carefully. That was my job.”

Edmondson somehow found time over the years to devote himself to public service related to his profession. He participated on state committees dealing with medication and racehorses, and he belonged to various associations, including the Southern California Veterinary Medical Association. He was appointed to the State Board of Examiners in Veterinary Medicine, and served as president of that panel.

In recent years, Edmondson cut back on his load and generally limited himself to working at some of the horse sales. But even that became too much for him, so he officially retired.

“Those horses are big, and some of them are frisky and will run you right over if you’re not quick enough to dance out of the way,” he explained. “The way my legs are now, my dancing days are over.

“I miss the job already. After all, I’ve been at the racetrack for most of my life. I’m proud of what I did, and thankful for the opportunity. All in all, working at the racetrack has been an honorable way to make a living.”



Edmondson received a commendation for his public service from former Los Angeles County Supervisor Pete Schabarum in 1986.

Articles and photographs appropriate for CHRB News & Review may be submitted to Mike Marten of the CHRB staff: 12235 Beach Blvd., Suite 7 Stanton, CA, 90680. (714) 890-7004, fax (714) 890-7006.

Please help us enforce California’s racing rules. Call (800) 805-7223 to report any violations.

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